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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001626

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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT AND DS/ATA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CE](#) [KTIA](#) [PTER](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA AND ATA TRAINING: A PLEA FOR IT TO
CONTINUE

(U) Prior to his departure for R&R Ambassador Wills asked that the following message be sent.

BEGIN TEXT

11. (U) I have recently heard that S/CT and DS/ATA no longer consider Sri Lanka a priority country when determining which countries should benefit from the Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Training Program.

12. (U) I hope that this is not true. The ATA program has been extremely effective in training SL forces and in extending American influence as the GSL for 20 years has battled one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups, the LTTE (an FTO listed group).

13. (SBU) I have served in many countries where the ATA program existed -- most recently as DCM in India where I cancelled the program due to Indian abuse. I am cognizant of the potential benefit ATA can yield to a country as well as the program's potential to be misused.

14. (SBU) I think the case to continue ATA training in Sri Lanka is strong. Sri Lanka consistently receives compliments from ATA instructors and State Department escort officers. Here, unlike what was the case in India, this needed program is very much appreciated -- especially by the current pro-US government. The program has had an impact. Sri Lanka incorporates ATA curriculum into its police training. It sends candidates who can directly benefit from the training - not political cronies. Recent ATA graduates include the Acting Inspector General of Police and likely successor to the recently deceased IGP and many other high-level police officials. The corresponding benefit to the USG from ATA training is immense as competent, pro-US officers take positions of responsibility in the effort against terror. The ATA program review in 2001 found that Sri Lanka was indeed using the training in an efficient and productive manner.

15. (SBU) On the heels of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister's meeting with President Bush and the recent visit of Deputy Secretary Armitage to Sri Lanka, decreasing ATA's engagement

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in this country would send the wrong message. At a time when we are increasing assistance to Sri Lanka, a reduction or elimination of one of our highest profile and most successful programs, and in one of our highest priority areas, to wit the fight against terror, causes me concern.

16. (U) I respectfully ask that S/CT and DS/ATA consider the above when deciding which countries should benefit from ATA training. In my view, Sri Lanka deserves this program. It's a program which should be increased rather than reduced.

17. (U) Thank you very much, Ambassador E. Ashley Wills

END TEXT

AMSELEM